

VIII. *An Account of an Eruption of Mount Vesuvius: In a Letter to Philip Carteret Webb, Esq; F. R. S. from Sir Francis Haskins Eyles Stiles, Bart. F. R. S.*

Dear Sir,

Naples, 23d Dec. 1760.

Read Jan. 29,
1761.

I Did not intend to have paid my respects to you, till I had better leisure; but a sudden eruption of Vesuvius this day prompts me to give you a few lines by this post. The mountain, which was quiet in the morning, with scarce any visible smoke, threw up on a sudden, about noon, a vast column of black smoke, which rose to a very considerable height; and, before it had diffused itself, made a splendid and glorious appearance, as the sun, which was then shining, gilded the superior part of it; but soon after, it dispersed, and covered all the mountain, and a great portion of the sky in that quarter. The ashes, that fell from it, resembled the falling of a heavy shower, seen at a distance, and must have done great mischief, if any living thing was under them, as is but too probable. The drift of the storm, if I may call it so, was towards the south-east, the wind being, I believe, nearly north-west. Portici might be within its influence; but the body of the smoke seemed to go beyond it; I mean, that it passed on the south-east side of it, which is beyond it, reckoning from Naples. At the same time that this smoke broke out, we observed two large columns of smoke arising at the foot of the mountain, on the south-east side of it which bespoke eruptions in

in that part: and this has proved true; for the first smoke from the top soon after decreased, probably from the vent obtained at the foot; and ever since sunset, we have seen the foot all on fire. It is now burning with great violence in that part, it being about eleven o'clock at night. The direction of the line of fire, as we see it, is from the mountain towards the sea, and runs, as we judge here, in that part, where Pliny's Lava, as it is called, came down to the sea. The present lava cannot, we think, be far from the sea. We suppose, that the mountain has burst in its side, somewhere much nearer the summit; but that the lava has run down under the old lava, till it broke out where the fire now is. The line of fire, we think, must be two, if not three, miles in length.

Mr. Lowther, and his companion Mr. Watson, were at the mountain, when the smoke broke out at the summit, and had almost climbed its height; but were fortunately to the windward of it, or they must have been destroyed. The noise, they say, was shocking to them, and the stones thrown up very alarming. Their guides fled first, and they after them; and they have escaped all harm, but the fatigue. As the post sets out in a quarter of an hour, I can only hastily assure you of my being truly

Yours, &c.

F. H. Eyles Stiles.